

FISHERY MANAGEMENT PLAN
FOR THE COMMERCIAL TANNER CRAB FISHERY
IN THE SOUTH PENINSULA DISTRICT OF REGISTRATION AREA J, 2001

By
David R. Jackson
Michael P. Ruccio
and
Carrie Worton

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AUTHORS

Dave Jackson is a fisheries biologist for the Alaska Department of Fish and Game, Division of Commercial Fisheries, 211 Mission Road, Kodiak AK 99615.

Mike Ruccio is a fisheries biologist for the Alaska Department of Fish and Game, Division of Commercial Fisheries, 211 Mission Road, Kodiak AK 99615.

Carrie Worton is a fisheries biologist for the Alaska Department of Fish and Game, Division of Commercial Fisheries, 211 Mission Road, Kodiak AK 99615.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>Page</u>
LIST OF TABLES.....	i
LIST OF FIGURES.....	i
LIST OF APPENDICES	i
ABSTRACT	1
INTRODUCTION.....	2
REGULATIONS	3
Fishing Season, Gear Operation Hours, and Vessel Size Limit.....	3
Pot Limit.....	5
Legal Gear	5
Operation of Other Pot Gear, Pot Storage, and Landing Requirements	6
Registration and Tank Inspection	6
Legal Size Limit.....	7
FISHERY MANAGEMENT PLAN AND VOLUNTEER CATCH REPORTING	7
LITERATURE CITED	8
TABLES	9
APPENDIX	10

LIST OF TABLES

<u>Table</u>	<u>Page</u>
1. Commercial catch and effort for the South Peninsula Management District Tanner crab <i>Chionoecetes bairdi</i> fishery, 1967-2000	9

LIST OF FIGURES

<u>Figure</u>	<u>Page</u>
1. South Peninsula Tanner crab fishing District, 2001	2
2. Number of mature male Tanner crabs per kilometer towed in the 1999 South Peninsula trawl survey.....	4

LIST OF APPENDICES

<u>Appendix</u>	<u>Page</u>
A. Estimated population of male Tanner crabs by carapace width in the South Peninsula District, 1987-2000	11
B. Listing of contact persons, by agency and location.	12

ABSTRACT

The South Peninsula District will open for a commercial Tanner crab fishery on January 15, 2001 with a guideline harvest level of 375,000 pounds. This report provides a brief historic overview of the fishery and summarizes the new harvest strategy for South Peninsula Tanner crabs that was adopted by the Alaska Board of Fisheries in 1999. Important changes to regulations affecting pot limits and legal gear requirements are described. Information on tank inspections, inseason reporting, pot storage, landing requirements, gear operation hours, and contact personnel within the Alaska Department of Fish and Game is also provided. Harvesters are encouraged to use this document as a supplement to the 2000-2002 Commercial Shellfish Fishing Regulations to understand changes affecting this fishery.

INTRODUCTION

The South Peninsula District of Area J for Tanner crabs includes all waters south of the Alaska Peninsula and west of the line from Kupreanof Point to the easternmost point of Castle Rock then extending 135° southeast from the easternmost point of Castle Rock and east of the longitude of Scotch Cap Light. A full description of the districts can be found at 5 AAC 35.505 DESCRIPTION OF REGISTRATION AREA J DISTRICTS on page 187 of the shellfish regulations and are illustrated in Figure 1. The South Peninsula District is a nonexclusive registration area for Tanner crabs.

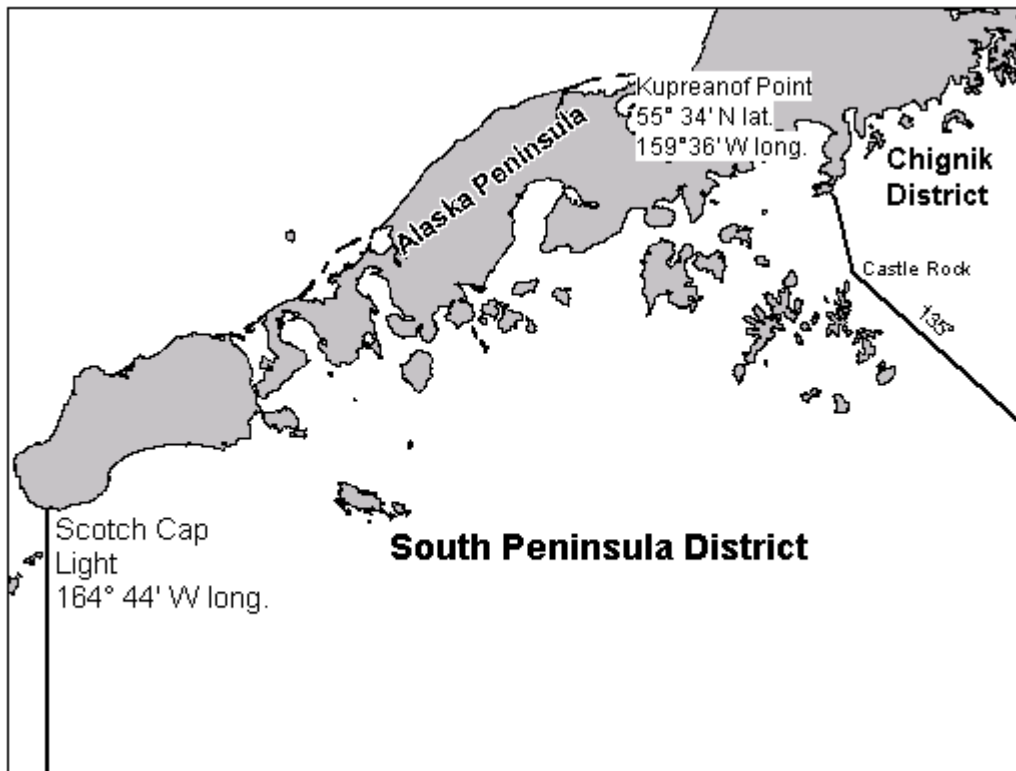


Figure 1. South Peninsula Tanner crab fishing District, 2001.

The first harvest of Tanner crabs from the South Peninsula District occurred in 1967 when 3,100 pounds were landed. The fishery grew quickly and, by 1973, the harvest exceeded five million pounds (Table 1). Guideline harvest levels (GHLs) were established in 1974 and, in 1975, seasons were imposed to protect crabs during the mating and molting period. In 1976, the minimum size limit of 5.5" carapace width (CW) was established. During the six fishing seasons from 1974 through 1978/79, harvests ranged from five to nine million pounds. Harvest peaked in 1978/79 when nine million pounds of crabs were caught. From 1979 to 1984, harvest and catch per unit effort (CPUE) declined as a result of low recruitment and in the 1984 season the fleet landed two million pounds. Recruitment improved between 1985 and 1988 and harvest ranged from two million to four million pounds. Harvest decreased to one million pounds in 1989 and indications from the trawl

survey data predicted a decline in recruitment for future years. The fishery has been closed since 1990 due to low abundance of legal-sized crabs and lack of recruitment. The Alaska Board of Fisheries (BOF) established a limit of 75 pots in 1993 for GHLS greater than 600,000 pounds. When the guideline harvest level is less than 600,000 pounds, the limit is 40 pots per vessel.

In 1999, ADF&G presented the BOF with a comprehensive harvest strategy for Tanner crabs in the South Peninsula District. The harvest strategy established thresholds of abundance that must be met, estimated by a preseason trawl survey, to allow for a commercial Tanner crab fishery (Urban et al. 1999). The harvest strategy requires additional criteria to be in place for an opening of commercial Tanner crab fishery in the South Peninsula District. A minimum GHL of 200,000 pounds must exist before a fishery can be allowed. Other measures resulted in a revised stair-step pot limit of 30, 40, or 75 pots per vessel depending on GHL size and a vessel size limit of 58 feet length overall for the South Peninsula District. The harvest strategy, as adopted by the BOF, can be found under 5 AAC 35.507 KODIAK, CHIGNIK, AND SOUTH PENINSULA DISTRICTS, *C. bairdi* TANNER CRAB HARVEST STRATEGIES in the 2000-2002 Commercial Shellfish Fishing Regulations, which will be referred to as 'shellfish regulations' for the remainder of this report.

REGULATIONS

General regulations pertaining to Tanner crab fishing in the State of Alaska can be found under chapter 35 of title 5 of the Alaska Administrative Code (AAC). Chapter 35 begins on page 164 of the shellfish regulations. For simplification, specific regulations that pertain to the Tanner crab fisheries in Area J (Westward) are listed beginning on page 186 of the shellfish regulations. Some of the regulations regarding Tanner crab fishing are summarized below, particularly those regulations which have changed since the last South Peninsula District commercial fishery in 1989. For additional information on regulations, contact the ADF&G office in Kodiak or the seasonal office in Sand Point and rely on the 2000-2002 shellfish regulations (also available at ADF&G offices or at our website: <http://www.state.ak.us/adfg/>).

Fishing Season, Gear Operation Hours, and Vessel Size Limit

When the South Peninsula District is determined to be above the established thresholds for opening, the season will open to commercial Tanner crab fishing on January 15 at 12:00 NOON. **The GHL for the 2001 season will be 375,000 pounds.** The estimate of legal crabs, from the 2000 trawl survey, is approximately 875,000 animals in the South Peninsula District. Appendix A contains the estimated population of male Tanner crabs by shell width from the 2000 trawl survey. The remainder of the 2000 survey information cannot be released until the commercial fishery is complete. Figure 2 contains the distribution of molting mature male crabs from the 1999 trawl survey.

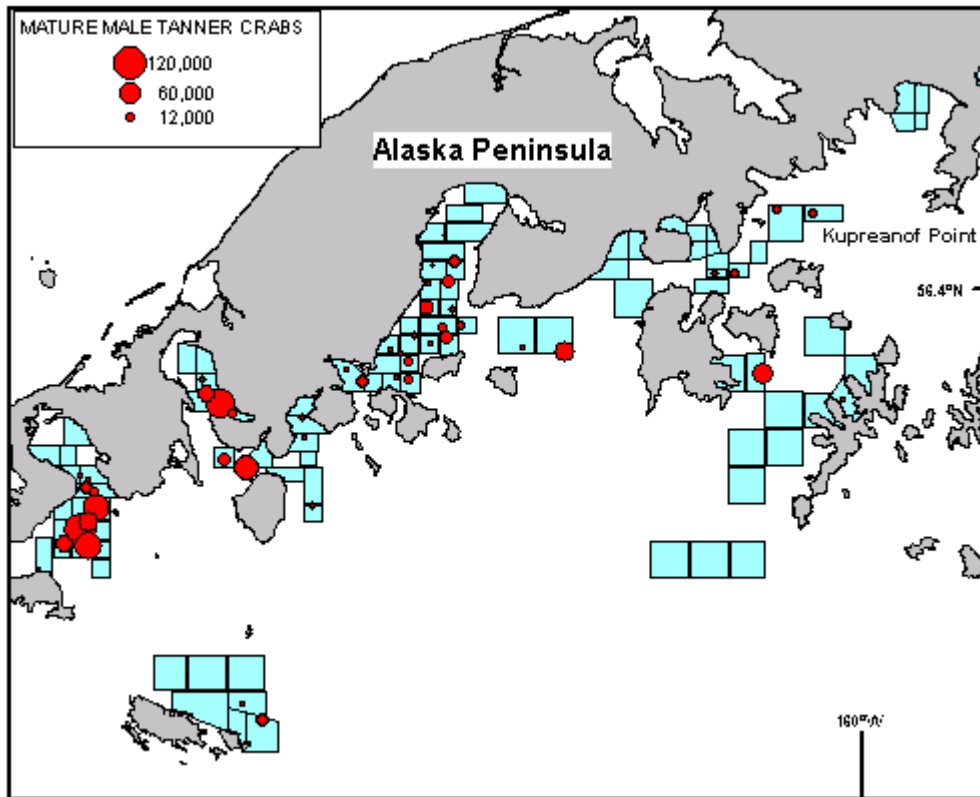


Figure 2. Number of mature male Tanner crabs per kilometer towed in the 1999 South Peninsula trawl survey.

The fishery will close when ADF&G determines that the GHL is achieved or when stock conditions, such as poor fishery performance or excessive bycatch of female or sublegal male Tanner crabs, threaten the long term health of the stock and sustained yield. The regulatory season closure date is March 31.

To improve manageability of the South Peninsula District fishery, ADF&G will establish gear operation hours, by emergency order, that are similar to those in place for the Kodiak District. Pot gear may only be operated from 8:00 AM to 7:59 PM with a 12 hour soak period each night. Operating of gear, which includes setting or retrieving pots, is strictly prohibited from 8:00 PM to 7:59 AM. Further information on both fishing seasons and the language for the gear operation hours to be implemented can be found under 5 AAC 35.510 FISHING SEASONS FOR REGISTRATION AREA J on page 191 of the shellfish regulations.

A vessel size limit of 58' length overall was adopted by the BOF in 1999 for the South Peninsula District Tanner crab fishery. Overall length is defined as the straight-line length between the extremities of the vessel, excluding anchor rollers. The regulation 5 AAC 35.590 VESSEL LENGTH RESTRICTIONS on page 200 of the shellfish regulations contains the specific language on vessel length requirements.

Pot Limit

New pot limits for the South Peninsula District, based on total GHL, were adopted by the BOF in 1999. When the district GHL is less than 600,000 pounds, no more than 30 aggregate pots may be operated from a validly registered Tanner crab vessel. When the district GHL is more than 600,000 pounds but less than 1,000,000 pounds, no more than 40 pots may be operated. When the district GHL is greater than 1,000,000 pounds no more than 75 pots may be used. **The pot limit for the 2001 South Peninsula District fishery will be 30 pots per vessel.**

To ensure compliance with pot limit regulations, the main or trailer buoy on each pot must display one fishery-specific identification tag for the current year. The regulation 5 AAC 35.526 TANNER CRAB POT MARKING REQUIREMENTS FOR REGISTRATION AREA J on page 196 of the shellfish regulations contains guidelines for replacing lost tags. The vessel owner, operator, or agent must complete an affidavit form describing how the tags were lost and supplying the unique number(s) of each lost tag.

Tags will be available for purchase beginning in mid-December at a cost of \$1.50 per tag. ADF&G personnel will be in King Cove and Sand Point seven to ten days prior to the fishery opening to sell buoy tags. Prior to this time, tags may be purchased from the ADF&G office in Kodiak via U.S. Mail. For details, contact the ADF&G office in Kodiak at (907) 486-1840.

Legal Gear

Legal gear for the commercial Tanner crab fishery in the South Peninsula District is limited to pots no more than 10 feet long by 10 feet wide by 42 inches high with rigid tunnel eye openings that are not more than five inches in one dimension with tunnel eye opening perimeters that individually are more than 36 inches. Because the South Peninsula District is closed to commercial fishing for king crabs, pots used for Tanner crabs may not have tunnel eye openings more than five inches in height. The specific language regarding legal pot dimensions can be found under 5 AAC 35.050 LAWFUL GEAR FOR TANNER CRAB on page 169 of the shellfish regulations.

Since the last commercial fishery in the South Peninsula in 1989, escape mesh or ring requirements have been added to regulations for legal Tanner gear. Each pot used to take Tanner crabs must have at least one third of one vertical surface of the pot composed of not less than 7-1/4 inch stretched mesh webbing or have no less than four circular escape rings of no less than five inches inside diameter. If using rings, they must be installed on the vertical plane of the pot to allow for escapement of undersized crabs. The specific language on escape device requirements can be found under 5 AAC 35.525 LAWFUL GEAR FOR REGISTRATION AREA J on page 195 of the shellfish regulations.

All pots must be equipped with a biodegradable escape mechanism as described in 5 AAC 39.145 ESCAPE MECHANISM FOR SHELLFISH AND BOTTOMFISH POTS on page 44 of the shellfish regulations. An opening 18 inches or greater in length, within six inches of the bottom of the pot, and must be laced, sewn, or secured together by a single length of

untreated, 100 percent cotton twine no larger than 30 thread. Buoys utilized on pots must also comply with 5 AAC 35.051 TANNER CRAB GEAR MARKING REQUIREMENTS on page 169 of the shellfish regulations.

Operation of Other Pot Gear, Pot Storage, and Landing Requirements

There is a 14-day stand down period for the operation of pot gear before the commercial Tanner crab fishery opening in the South Peninsula District. No person or vessels that will participate in the South Peninsula District commercial Tanner crab fishery may operate commercial, subsistence, sport, or personal use pots within the district during that 14-day period.

After the closure of the Tanner crab season, vessels wishing to participate in the Pacific cod fishery must either store or bring in all Tanner pots and register with ADF&G for the cod fishery. Additional stipulations on the operation of other pot gear within the South Peninsula District can be found under 5 AAC 35.053 OPERATION OF OTHER POT GEAR on page 170 of shellfish regulations.

Pots may be stored in waters of 25 fathoms or less with all bait and bait containers removed and with doors secured fully open (or not secured closed for cone or pyramid pots). Pots may be legally stored in waters deeper than 25 fathoms seven days following the closure of a registration district provided all bait and bait containers are removed and doors are secured fully open. However, although gear storage does exist, no vessel may have more than the specified limit of pots onboard or in wet storage in the registration district while the vessel is validly registered. The regulatory language concerning pot storage can be found at 5 AAC 35.052 TANNER CRAB GEAR STORAGE REQUIREMENTS on page 169 of the shellfish regulations.

Vessels are required to be at their port of delivery within the registration district within 24 hours of the fishery closure. Vessels wishing to deliver to ports outside the district are required to contact the ADF&G office in Kodiak or ADF&G personnel in King Cove. Vessels must report to ADF&G the estimated number of crabs onboard the vessel at the time of the district closure, intended port and processing facility where delivering, and estimated time of arrival. Additional requirements exist for catcher-processors and vessels mechanically disabled. Vessels legitimately delayed due to circumstances of weather will be addressed on a case by case basis. The specific regulation is 5 AAC 35.031 TANNER CRAB LANDING REQUIREMENTS on page 166 of the shellfish regulations.

Registration and Tank Inspection

Vessel operators must have a 2001 interim use permit card for South Peninsula Tanner crab and a 2001 commercial vessel license. Both can be obtained from the Commercial Fisheries Entry Commission (CFEC) in Juneau.

Tank inspections are required for vessels with a circulating sea water system, to confirm that no crabs are onboard the vessel prior to the opening. Fishing gear will also be

inspected at the time of tank inspection to ensure it is legal. Tank inspection will begin at noon on January 14, twenty-four hours prior to the fishery opening. Arrangements will be made to accommodate vessels wishing to be inspected in Sand Point and in King Cove. Upon successful completion of the tank inspection and gear inspection process, a valid 2001 shellfish registration will be issued to the vessel. A copy of this registration must remain onboard the vessel while fishing.

Legal Size Limit

The legal minimum size of Tanner crabs which can be harvested in the South Peninsula District is 5.5" carapace width (CW). Only legal male crabs can be retained, all other crabs incidentally captured must be immediately returned to the water unharmed. This includes king crab that cannot be legally retained for subsistence purposes from commercial fishing gear.

FISHERY MANAGEMENT PLAN AND VOLUNTEER CATCH REPORTING

ADF&G will manage the South Peninsula District commercial Tanner crab fishery from inseason catch reports provided by fishers. Inseason management will allow for real time fishery decisions and the ability to consider changes in effort, fleet fishing behavior, and weather. ADF&G staff will make every effort to allow sufficient time for fishers to configure gear for storage or to place gear in storage before a closure. There is, however, the possibility that a very short closure notification period could occur.

Any validly registered vessel may participate in the reporting process. Reports will be taken over marine VHF, SSB, telephone, or e-mail. Vessel operators will be asked during tank inspections to participate in inseason reporting. ADF&G will need to know how many vessels are operating accurate estimates of effort and for harvest projection purposes.

Operators will be asked to report the number of pots lifted and number of crabs retained for each 12 hour fishing period. Reports will be taken at 8:00 PM daily and may be transmitted via single side band (SSB), marine telex, e-mail, and satellite or cellular phone. Vessel operators will be asked during inseason reporting signup which method they will use to submit daily reports. ADF&G will update the fleet on the status of the fishery each morning at 7:30 AM on SSB 4125 kHz. Any closure announcement will be made on this frequency. Updates and closure announcements will also be distributed via e-mail, FAX, and passed along to all participating processing facilities.

Details of the tank inspection process, inseason reporting structure and other fishery related information will be forthcoming in ADF&G news releases.

LITERATURE CITED

Urban, D., D. Pengilly, D. Jackson, I. Vining. 1999. A Tanner crab harvest strategy for Kodiak, Chignik, and the South Peninsula Districts. A Report to the Board of Fisheries. Alaska Department of Fish and Game, Division of Commercial Fisheries, Westward Region, Regional Information Report 4K99-21, Kodiak.

Table 1. Commercial catch and effort for the South Peninsula Management District Tanner crab *Chionoecetes bairdi* fishery, 1967-2000.

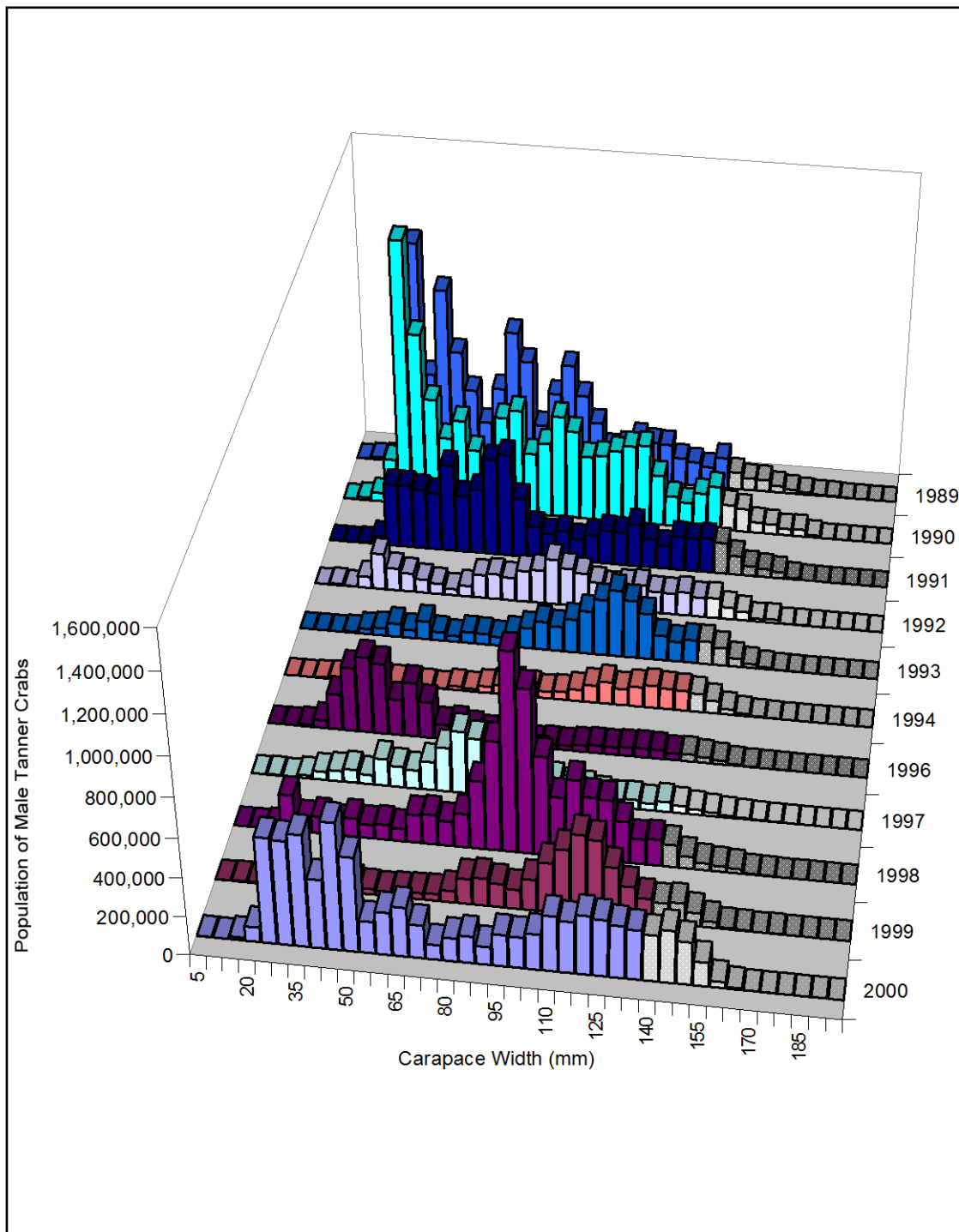
Year	Number Vessels	Number Landings	Number Crabs ^a	Number Pounds ^a	Pots Lifted	Average Weight	CPUE	Price per Pound ^b (\$)	Percent Recruits
1967	NA	NA	NA	3,100	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
1968	NA	155	36,835	110,610	NA	3	NA	NA	NA
1969	NA	173	221,946	606,178	NA	2.7	NA	NA	NA
1970	NA	NA	NA	2,093,600	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
1971	17	242	813,610	2,140,585	NA	2.6	NA	0.10	NA
1972	NA	NA	NA	3,618,900	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
1973	36	390	2,213,006	5,615,563	53,573	2.5	41	NA	NA
1974	44	386	3,504,668	8,300,578	58,444	2.4	60	NA	NA
1974/75	44	131	2,053,530	5,195,800	38,153	2.5	54	0.14	NA
1975/76	36	288	2,724,509	6,926,161	52,381	2.5	52	0.20	NA
1976/77	28	389	2,524,565	6,773,838	63,143	2.7	40	0.32	NA
1977/78	36	374	2,847,948	7,446,270	70,587	2.6	40	0.40	NA
1978/79	48	332	3,267,122	8,684,408	82,374	2.7	40	0.51	66
1979/80	61	363	2,581,544	6,961,251	96,989	2.7	27	0.54	40
1980/81	43	268	1,274,539	3,294,106	59,560	2.6	21	0.58	35
1981/82	72	365	1,815,060	4,589,042	81,008	2.5	22	1.05	50
1983	82	230	1,144,096	2,863,798	70,524	2.5	16	1.20	55
1984	61	207	775,472	1,789,883	50,726	2.3	15	1.04	30
1985	52	184	1,097,182	2,549,686	47,465	2.3	23	1.42	73.0
1986	74	187	1,589,759	3,781,950	65,078	2.4	24	1.72	73
1987	54	106	950,300	2,400,784	37,511	2.5	25	2.03	56
1988	73	148	1,359,371	3,328,809	52,516	2.4	26	2.20	79
1989	65 ^c	87	433,112	1,055,082	27,958	2.4	15	2.70	53
1990-2000	No commercial fishery has occurred since 1989.								

^aIncludes deadloss.

^bComputed for live crabs.

^cOne additional vessel was registered but did not fish in the District.

APPENDIX



Appendix A. Estimated population of male Tanner crabs by carapace width in the South Peninsula District, 1987-2000

(Note- The lightly colored portions of each year represents the estimated population that is legal sized.)

Appendix B. Listing of contact persons, by agency and location.

Alaska Department of Fish and Game

web site: <http://www.cf.adfg.state.ak.us/region4/.htm>

Kodiak office

<i>Mail address:</i>	211 Mission Road Kodiak, Alaska 99615	<i>physical address:</i>	211 Mission Road 2 nd floor, Kodiak	Phone: (907) 486-1840 FAX : (907) 486-1824
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Wayne Donaldson	Westward region shellfish/ groundfish biologist	wayne_donaldson@fishgame.state.ak.us
Dave Jackson	Kodiak, Chignik, Alaska Peninsula Area shellfish/ groundfish biologist	dave_jackson@fishgame.state.ak.us
Mike Ruccio	Kodiak, Chignik, Ak. Pen. Assistant Area shellfish/ groundfish biologist	mike_ruccio@fishgame.state.ak.us
Carrie Worton	Kodiak, Chignik, Alaska Peninsula Staff biologist	carrie_worton@fishgame.state.ak.us

Dutch Harbor office

<i>Mail address:</i>	P. O. Box 920587 Dutch Harbor, Alaska 99692	<i>physical address:</i>	F.T.S. building, 2 nd floor Airport Beach Road, Dutch Harbor.	Phone: (907) 581-1239 FAX: (907) 581-1572
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Rance Morrison	Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands Area biologist	rance_morrison@fishgame.state.ak.us
Forrest Bowers	Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands Assistant Area biologist	forrest_bowers@fishgame.state.ak.us
Robert 'Skip' Gish	Bering Sea/Aleutian Island Assistant Area biologist	robert_gish@fishgame.state.ak.us

Division of Fish and Wildlife Protection

web site: <http://www.dps.state.ak.us/fwp/>

Kodiak office

<i>Mail address:</i>	211 Bartell Kodiak, Alaska 99615	<i>physical address:</i>	211 Bartell 2 nd floor, Kodiak	Phone: (907) 486-4761 FAX: (907) 486-5480
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Lieutenant Joanna Roop	Post Lieutenant	joanna_roop@dps.state.ak.us
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National Marine Fisheries Service

web site: <http://www.fakr.noaa.gov/>

Kodiak office-management

<i>Mail address:</i>	P. O. Box 1638 Kodiak, Alaska 99615	<i>physical address:</i>	301 Research Court Near Island, Kodiak	Phone: (907) 481-1780 FAX : (907) 481-1701
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Tom Pearson	Gulf of Alaska management biologist	Tom.Pearson@noaa.gov
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Kodiak office-enforcement

<i>Mail address:</i>	1211 Gibson Cove Rd. Kodiak, Alaska 99615	<i>Physical address:</i>	Gibson Cove Complex Gibson Cove, Kodiak	Phone: (907) 486-3298 FAX: (907) 486-6868
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